"Musings on the Information Element of Power in an Era of Economic Challenge"[1]: A speech by Professor Dennis M. Murphy to The Association of Old Crows Capital Club Chapter. Presented on the occasion of the award of lifetime achievement to Dr. Dan Kuehl, July 24, 2012.

Abstract: Professor Murphy explores the role of the information element of power in support of national security objectives over the past decade, discusses some rapidly emerging trends as resourcing and the national strategy shifts, and proposes a future way ahead where information as power can be fully exploited.

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It's a pleasure to speak to you today and be in the company of a group of great professionals. Perhaps more importantly, it's an honor to be here to recognize the service of Dr. Dan Kuehl to the information strategist community and his contributions to its body of knowledge, which I cannot overemphasize. Dan and I met about 7 ½ years ago. I had just been hired by the Army War College to head up a small directorate focused on information operations and the information element of power. I had some background and experience in these areas, but I suspect Dan rolled his

[1] The views contained in this speech are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Army War College, Department of Defense or any other department or agency within the U.S. Government.

eyes when I called and asked for an office call so that he could give me some advice on how to move ahead…but you never would have known it when I arrived at FT McNair that January day in 2005. Dan opened his office to me, his curriculum and his approach to teaching strategic leaders. I've considered him a close friend and colleague, mentor and confidante ever since. Whatever insights I bring to you today are rooted in the seeds planted by Dan Kuehl and reflected in my teaching, research and outreach.

My thesis today is that information as an element of U.S. national power is at a crossroads. And, if national security professionals take the wrong turn in response to current economic challenges, they will pay a significant price securing the future long-term objectives of our nation.

Let me take you on a quick journey of the recent past…most of you have lived this, but it's important to set the context. Then I'll discuss what I feel are disturbing trends as the Nation looks to trim the budget. Finally, I'll propose a way ahead to avoid the "wrong turn" I just mentioned.

Those of you wearing Army uniforms in the audience may remember the reduction from 18 divisions to 10 as the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War ended. Some of you may not know of, or remember a similar State Department "peace dividend". The United States Information Agency's

functions were folded into the Broadcasting Board of Governors and across the State Department in 1999 with its prime mission given to the Bureau of International Information Programs. Thus, a cabinet level organization was subsumed into a bureau with a "coordinator", essentially three levels down from its previous position within the executive branch. The war was won, resources were cut and, frankly, it was no different than any other post-war period in our history. Before I fast-forward a few years, let me remind you of another interesting historical factoid from 1999. That was the year Internet penetration went exponential in the United States. Perhaps the world had changed in more ways than we thought and we just hadn't recognized it (or appreciated it) at that point.

Let's move ahead to 2005--one of the first things I did at the Army War College was to organize an international workshop entitled "Information Operations and Winning the Peace." You'll remember that time period— late 2005. Interestingly, we spent the first two hours of the workshop arguing over the definition of IO. In the end the final report was entitled "Shifting Fire: Information Effects in Counterinsurgency and Stability Operations." That change in title reflected the new global reality we were facing. An updated joint publication on information operations was published immediately on the heels of our workshop in February, 2006.

Meanwhile, Joseph Nye, the prescient Harvard Dean and former Assistant Secretary of Defense had published his seminal book "Soft Power" in 2004. The subtitle "The Means to Success in World Politics" was prophetic. The ever-increasing importance of information as power to national security and warfare became rapidly apparent. Our adversaries certainly understood information as a strategic means to asymmetrically attack the world's only remaining superpower. The IED proves a prime example, where a horrendous tactical kinetic weapon becomes an arguably more important strategic information weapon when the detonator is paired with a videographer. And the United States continued (albeit glacially given the stakes) to grow the expertise, doctrine and education curricula previously gutted by that Cold War peace dividend. The 2006 DOD Quadrennial Defense Review included a spinoff on strategic communication and, as a senior DOD official publicly stated at the time, we quickly went about "flying that plane while building it." Cyberspace operations formally entered the lexicon in 2008…but the truth is that we had introduced so many new information-based concepts, definitions and processes in the midst of war, that confusion reigned and the U.S. sputtered along with limited success in employing information as power.

But in recent years real progress has been made. Technology helped. Web 2.0 and social media allowed the United States to have a voice…to dialog. It provided an opportunity to compete with extremist voices and tell our story proactively by becoming our own gatekeepers and agenda setters. We saw funding for DOD information related programs increase dramatically, to the point where Congress actually started to provide oversight. (There's good and bad news there.) We became better organized at the strategic, operational and tactical levels to plan, execute, and support information as an element of national power. Examples within the beltway include moving the information operations and strategic communication portfolios under the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; the establishment of Deputy Assistant Secretaries for Public Diplomacy in each of the regional bureaus of State; operationalizing our focused efforts to counter Al Qaeda extremist voices with the establishment of the Center for Strategic Counter-terrorism Communication at State; advancement of legislation to modernize the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 to meet the needs of the information age. And in our theaters of war evidence points to progress in effectively managing information effects that enable mission success by competing with a holistic approach toward actions, images and words. We

even came to grips with mind-numbing bureaucratic definitions and widely mis-perceived terminology (e.g. PSYOP vs. MISO).

So it appeared that this progress was taking root and becoming enduring. And not a minute too soon if you consider the immediate and longer-term future. The information environment will certainly continue to remain an important strategic consideration to enable policy and military success. Access to information is ubiquitous. Consider not only the Internet but, perhaps even more striking, the role of mobile telephony. The World Bank reported recently that ¾ of the world now has access to mobile phones, with 5 Billion subscriptions in the developing world. 30 Billion apps were downloaded in 2011 alone. The United States must have a voice in the dialog within this rapidly evolving environment. It must effectively inform, engage, persuade and influence global actors and it must have a trained and educated cadre of professionals who understand the nuanced requirements of that effort. While Admiral Mullen rightly identified strategic communication as a process that we all must effectively participate in, such processes must have process managers to advise, plan and integrate to full success.

Beyond considerations of the future importance of the information environment, our strategy focus over the next decades offers a unique opportunity to employ the information element of power. President Obama recently announced a new strategic pivot for the Nation focused on the Pacific.

The implications of this policy shift are far-ranging. Militarily, our Pacific focus will rely heavily on naval and air forces to maintain stability and deter aggression. But effective strategy relies on the integrated application of all the elements of national power. In the case of a Pacific looking strategy the preeminent element employed should be information.

Interestingly, using information as power to influence fits nicely into both the geo-strategic constraints and opportunities of the Pacific region. First, employing the information element of power is relatively cheap. The State Department's use of public diplomacy to wield information as power is but a minute fraction of the budget of the Defense Department. And while it may seem counterintuitive to the un-informed to consider the U.S. military as a source of information as power, in fact their influence by co-opting can be significant. The combatant command theater security cooperation strategies spawn military-to-military relationships and military-sponsored

activities that send significant and loud messages to the populations of the region.

Furthermore, the information element of power arguably works best in an environment where the U.S. hopes to shape the geo-strategic landscape to support their interests while deterring aggression by potential adversaries (known as phase 0 and phase 1 operations in military terms). This best describes the current Pacific environment. Again, these are relatively cheap ways to influence compared to the enormous economic costs of hard power reflected by traditional military hardware and force structure.

Thus, three significant factors come together that would make information as power viable and strategically important to the United States today and into the future: first, we have turned a corner in getting our arms around information processes, doctrine, policy and education; second, the current and future information environment makes the strategic use of information as power essential; and finally, our shift to a Pacific focus makes the use of information as a preeminent power source both economically and strategically sensible.

So, let's look at the direction of the Nation's first steps as we stand at that crossroads I mentioned. At the strategic level, resource allocation is the

most telling indication of the importance placed on a capability. Consider

that in terms of information as an element of power. In December 2011, the

United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, the U.S.

Government's only body tasked with overseeing and promoting U.S.

Government activities intended to understand, inform, and influence foreign

publics was eliminated by Congress. Congress has increasingly questioned

and cut the information budget of the Department of Defense. The Office of

the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs has killed its

Communication Planning and Integration Directorate. The Joint Military

Information Support Command has been eliminated. The Joint Information

Operations Warfare Center has been eliminated as a functional supporting

command under U.S. Strategic Command and reduced to a Joint Staff

Chairman controlled activity. We seem to be following suit at the

operational and tactical level in Afghanistan as we draw down forces. The

ISAF Joint Command IO staff has been reduced significantly. This at a time

when one could argue that information operations is increasingly important

in Afghanistan.

A recent post to Tom Rick's blog "The Best Defense" included a quote that,

while not meant to describe the information element of power, equally

applies: "In times of great stress and famine, a roach will eat itself, starting

with its hind legs. Without such stress or famine, the leadership of (U.S. government) has decided to consume part of the lobes of its brain. This is a…tragedy that will not help us adapt to a challenging future." Or, as Dan would remind us in one of his more memorable presentations, quoting the great philosopher Pogo, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

I started out with a discussion of the lost opportunities caused by the peace dividend at the end of the Cold War. We have just lived through 11 years of conflict trying to recover what should never have been lost with regard to information as power. The future could become eerily familiar unless something can be done now to stem the bleeding and perhaps for once truly *learn* the lessons of history.

With that in mind I leave you with a proposal. It's appropriate that I present it in this venue since it has its origins in a paper that Dan and I recently co-authored entitled "The Case for a National Information Strategy." In the paper we stress that the information environment consists of three inextricably linked dimensions: connectivity, content and cognition. We offer that a national information strategy, therefore must address these three dimensions in concert. Today we have national strategies for cyberspace (arguably focused on the connectivity) and a national framework for

strategic communication (arguably the content and cognition) but they are stovepiped and refer little if at all to the whole of the information environment. Consequently, they lack the ability, when operationalized of attaining synergies.

Perhaps even more importantly, strategy drives resources, a point not to be lost in an era of economic challenge. So let's think about that for a moment. We all know that cyberspace is the latest bright, shiny object. The cyber defense market is projected to grow with a compound annual growth rate of greater than 4% and a growth rate in the research and development segment of 10% annually out to 2020. This confirms what we all probably intuitively realize: the connectivity dimension of the information environment is a growth industry in a diminishing economy. On the other hand, the areas that have been cut fall almost exclusively to the content and cognition dimensions.

So, if you accept that the information element of power is most effectively employed by applying all three dimensions of the information environment synergistically, then an overarching national information strategy makes sense. And, if cyber/connectivity is inherently part of that strategy, then its resourcing will spill over to support content and cognition. This may require

organizational changes and breaking rice bowls…but the alternative is failure and a trip down an undesirable memory lane (or, as another great philosopher Yogi Berra reminds us, "déjà vu all over again"). I, for one, don't think we can afford such a mistake as a Nation and I think we have an obligation to avoid the blunders of the past.

Let me close by noting that the challenge I offer you today is made ever more difficult with the loss, at least to the U.S. Government, of one of the great thinkers of our era on this subject. Dan Kuehl's legacy lies first and foremost with his graduates and those he's touched in the classroom. I know that his happiest moments were in seminar, engaging in lively debates with the next generation of strategic leaders. He ensured that those same leaders who would soon wear stars or become senior executives had a full understanding and appreciation of the value and importance of the information element of power. Long after he departs NDU, that legacy will live on…and live on well beyond his physical presence at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia. Dan, I salute you and thank you, both as a colleague and valued friend.